

April 15, 1945
Germany.

Darling,

Today has been a day of loafing around, not doing much. The need for us here has now passed, and we hope to get orders to move along soon. We did some target practice in the morning, and then had a good snooze after lunch.

You comment on my medical job over here and my attitude about it. Here you are off the beam, and I must have given a wrong impression in my letters. Point one is, you say I am tired and depressed because I don't really believe in the merit of my job. This is wrong. I believe very heartily in the merit of my job. It is an important contribution to our war effort to save these boys' lives or to get them back in fighting trim. I thought I had made that clear. Depression is only a natural aftermath of the intense mental and emotional tension incident to any busy stint of work in the O.R. It is always cured by 24 hours sleep. Point two is your interpretation of what I meant by calling medics combatants. I do not mean to imply any change in the professional ethics of their functions. They do not kill prisoners or wounded enemy. They treat them, as now, as doctors. Once an enemy soldier is captured or wounded, he becomes non-effective to the enemy - he is knocked out of the war. I only meant to imply that the job of medicine in an army is an integral part of its supply, maintenance, and morale, and that as such, it is a combatant function and reasonably subject to direct military action, with the destruction of its capacity to perform as the direct objective. This again would be determined in total war, by the power of the enemy to reciprocate. Like the use of gas, if your enemy can use it better than you, you would be foolish to start it. Likewise, if his hospitals are treating many of your wounded, it would be undesirable to attack them. These things are pragmatic, and not based on so-called "civilized concepts" of war. Don't get the idea that I meant the Docs should start in on euthanasia or become mortar men. The only "humane" rules which war can have are those regulating behavior toward those you have captured or conquered. Shooting of prisoners, beatings, torture, starvation, rape, confiscation, etc. are acts performed against a person or persons no longer combatant. These are crimes against your fellowman just as surely as if a war did not exist. There is a difference between bombing a city in enemy territory preparatory to attacking it, and deliberately sacking it after you have taken it. This is the way of Genghis Khan, Attila the Hun, Sennacherib, and Hitler. Thank goodness, it is not our way.
